



Poster code: ANA-PATH-25

Fatal plastic impaction in a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

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On 10 March, 2013, a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) was found dead on the beach of Nieuwpoort, Belgium. The animal was necropsied the day after and sampled following a standard procedure. The whale was a juvenile male of 3.4 m and an estimated weight of 400 kg. It was very fresh (conservation code 2) with hemorrhagic skin abrasions suggesting that it had stranded alive. The nutritional condition was poor (severe emaciation) with vertebral processes prominently discernible and a concave aspect of the dorsal muscular masses indicative for severe amyotrophy. The blubber thickness measured 24 mm. The main findings were anemia, subcutaneous edema, hydropericardium and hydroperitoneum (ascite) and edema around coronary vessels. Both lungs were uniformly congestive with a severe pulmonary edema. The size of the stomach was reduced and the gastric lumen in the fundus was filled with four compacted plastic items (400 g wet weight). The plastics bags were clogged tightly together at the junction with the third stomach, occluding the pylorus and responsible for an obstruction or impaction. The severe emaciation is believed to be associated with the gastric impaction responsible for a prolonged starvation. In baleen whales, ingestion of plastics has been described in a Bryde's whale (*B. edeni*) from Australia and in a minke whale from France, but in both cases, no associated consequences were reported and then this represents the first case of death due to litter ingestion in a baleen whale.